

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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SUBJECT: MAJOR PROJECT - ATHENS METRO: STATUS REPORT

REF: ATHENS 924

1. AFTER CONSIDERABLE DELAY, SEVEN-MEMBER BID EVALUATION COMMITTEE WAS APPOINTED EARLY APRIL TO REVIEW AND ANALYZE BIDS SUBMITTED JANUARY 31 BY JOINT VENTURE BECHTEL CORPORATION SOFRETU (FRENCH) AND NINE FOREIGN FIRMS (SEE REFTELS). ACTUAL EVALUATION AND AWARD RECOMMENDATION HOWEVER, WILL BE MADE BY METRO STUDY GROUP CHAIRED BY TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY'S SECRETARY GENERAL ZISSIS FOUFAS. OPTIMISTICALLY ALLOWING TWO MONTHS FOR ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION, CONTRACT AWARD COULD BE MADE BY TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER IN JULY OR AUGUST, OR LATER IF BROUGHT TO CABINET OR PARLIAMENT FOR APPROVAL.

2. ACTING AS OFFICIAL CONSULTANTS TO GOG ON SUBWAY MATTERS, CONSORTIUM OF U.S. FIRMS DE LEUW CATHER INTERNATIONAL AND WILBUR SMITH AND ASSOCIATES WERE TO BE INVOLVED IN BID EVALUATION PROCESS IN ADVISORY CAPACITY. ON THESE GROUNDS, ALTHOUGH PREQUALIFIED, THEY WERE NOTIFIED BY LETTER DATED JANUARY 18 THAT THEY MIGHT NOT BID ON JANUARY 31 FOR THE DOLS 5 MILLION PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONTRACT. THE CONSORTIUM RETIRED FROM THE COMPETITION WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THEIR CONTRACT (EXTENDED PREVIOUSLY FOR FOUR-AND-ONE-HALF MONTHS) WOULD BE EXTENDED AGAIN BEYOND ITS NEW EXPIRY OF APRIL 30.

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3. HAVING HEARD RECENTLY THAT GOG NOW WAS NOT INTENDING TO EXTEND THEIR CONTRACT, CONSORTIUM REPS SOUGHT MEETING WITH TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER GEORGE VOYATZYS TO FIND OUT (A) WHETHER CONTRACT COULD BE EXTENDED; (B) IF NOT, REASONS FOR SUCH ACTION. ROBERT A. HUBBARD, WILBUR SMITH'S VICE PRESIDENT FOR INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, REPORTED TO EMBASSY THAT HE HAD A "VERY SATISFACTORY" FIFTEEN-MINUTE MEETING WITH MINISTER VOYATZIS APRIL 24. MINISTER SAID THAT HE REGRETTED BOTH OFFICIALLY AND PERSONALLY HAVING TO TERMINATE CONSORTIUM'S CONSULTANCY CONTRACT, BUT THE DECISION WAS SOLELY DUE TO LACK OF FUNDS. HE STATED THAT HE FOUND NO FAULT WHATSOEVER WITH CONSORTIUM'S PERFORMANCE AND NOTHING PROFESSIONALLY REMISS. AT THIS PHASE, TRANSPORT MINISTER POINTED OUT, GOG HAS GIVEN PRIORITY TO FUNDING PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONTRACT. HE SAID THAT HE COULD NOT OVERRULE METRO STUDY GROUP CHAIRMAN FOUFAS AND VICE CHAIRMAN GEORGE LYMBERIDIS (COORDINATION MINISTRY GENERAL DIRECTOR) WHO ALLEGEDLY WERE AGAINST EXTENDING CONTRACT. MINISTER VOYATZIS ADDED THAT THERE WILL BE OPPORTUNITY TO RE-INVOLVE THE CONSORTIUM IN SUBWAY PROJECT "VERY SHORTLY". MR. HUBBARD EMPHASIZED TO EMBASSY THAT IN HIS DISCUSSION WITH TRANSPORT MINISTER VOYATZIS HE COULD DETECT NO POLITICAL OVERTONES IN GOG'S DECISION.

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